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DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/CEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: ELECTIONS REPORTING
TAGS: [KDEM](#) [NU](#) [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#)
SUBJECT: NICARAGUAN ELECTIONS REGIONAL REPORTING: BOACO

Classified By: Paul A. Trivelli. Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: On February 10, Property Officer and LES Lawyer visited Boaco, the rural capital of the Department of Boaco, located just to the north and east of Managua, to discuss upcoming elections with local leaders. While individuals differed on the merits of presidential and legislative candidates, all affirmed that democratic institutions in Nicaragua must be strengthened; that the bilateral working relationship with the United States is a historical given to be factored into any political outcome; and, that CAFTA-DR should be thoughtfully considered in terms of how it can benefit Boaco. Our respondents favored a new host of politicians not beholden to past obligations such as the Arnoldo Aleman-Daniel Ortega pact, but doubt that the current parties enjoy flexibility to allow an accommodation. End Summary

¶2. (SBU) Meetings included Dr. Hugo Barquero, President of the Boaco Organization of Vamos con Eduardo (MVE); Lic. Noel Ortega, President of the Association of Cattle Raisers of Boaco (AGB); Father Jose Moreira, Catholic Church Vicar; Dr. Roberto Luna, President of the local Liberal Constitutional Party (PLC); Dr. Armando Incer, President of the Amigos de Alvarado (AA); Lic. Frank Gutierrez, leader of the Herty Lewites 2006 group (Herty); and Carlos Gutierrez Lopez of the Christian Action Party/Accion Cristiana (AC). Sandinista splinter group interviewees included William Cuadra Lopez and Freddy Colorado Gonzalez of the Sandinista Rescue Group (Rescate al Sandinismo); and Noelia Guerrero Acevedo of the Movimiento Revolucionario Sandinista (MRS). A meeting with the local Boaco district Supreme Electoral Council (CSE) director was scheduled, but did not take place.

Economy of Boaco

¶3. (U) Boaco's economy relies on cattle, daily products, basic grains and coffee. Boaco needs roads and outside investment to grow its economy. Our contacts viewed CAFTA with interest and would like to be given an early opportunity to participate. They welcomed contacts and additional information.

Free and Fair Elections?

¶4. (C) When queried whether elections could be free and fair, respondents expressed concern about the reappearance of crazy mouse ("raton loco") ruses to hassle Boaco voters via transportation and bureaucratic snafus. Dr. Barquero of the MVE stated that Sandinistas successfully used this ploy in the 2004 Boaco municipal elections resulting in the incumbent Sandinista mayor's election. He added that non-Sandinistas face difficulties obtaining identity cards ("cedulas"),

another voter manipulation tactic. Lic. Ortega (AGB) reiterated the accusation, agreeing that the irregularities definitely cause Boaco voter roll distortions. Dr. Luna (PLC) concurred that Sandinistas aim to swell the ranks of voters by supplying rigged birth certificates to underage teens who lack civic education. In the 2004 municipal elections, Dr. Barquero (MVE) asserted that out of 35,000 registered voters, 25,000 were assumed to be Liberal. Nevertheless, Liberals received only 7,000 votes, compared to the Sandinistas' approximately 8,000: enough to win the elections. As a consequence, the FSLN can now quickly process documents for voters they favor, while they create obstacles for others.

Leading Candidates

15. (C) Although our interlocutors underscored the desirability of their particular candidates, most observed that Eduardo Montealegre has the best chance of winning votes in Boaco -- assuming he gets the nod from Aleman-controlled rural voters. Vicar Moreira stated that sympathy for a Montealegre candidacy can't ensure a win, but could effectively siphon off strength from the non-FSLN competition. On the other hand, Boaco PLC President/Assembly Deputy Luna generally damned with faint praise candidates other than former Vice President Jose Rizo and Congressman Enrique Quinones, but then acknowledged the importance of a disciplined and united front to achieve a PLC victory in November. Campaign visits by Montealegre, Alvarado and Lewites have generally been described as brief and underwhelming, unlike the vibrant street action generated by Aleman in years past -- another indication of how much credibility and charisma can overcome accusations of fraud and malfeasance.

16. (C) Despite naming dissident presidential candidate Eduardo Montealegre as the frontrunner, all of our interlocutors agreed that no democratic candidate enjoys enough personal momentum to defeat an FSLN-backed candidate without joining forces with the PLC through some sort of arrangement. None of the political parties has the FSLN's sheer organizational clout, militancy, ideological commitment and hierarchical obedience.

Polls

17. (C) Respondents questioned the science and reliability of polls in Nicaragua, suggesting that results depend on what answers the pollsters are trying to elicit and how the questions are spun. While Boaco AA President Armando Incer supported the polls as relative indicators of what voters are thinking, cattleman Noel Ortega characterized them as a potential electoral manipulation technique.

Movement for Nicaragua Marches

18. (C) Dr. Hugo Barquero, President of Vamos con Eduardo, related that he had participated in one of the Movimiento por Nicaragua (MpN) marches and observed effective Boaco busing coordination. Father Moreira noted that while the movement initially had strength in Granada and Chinandega, the impetus hadn't continued. AGB's Noel Ortega claimed the marches represented Sandinista ideology without the broad bipartisan support needed for success. AA's Dr. Armando Incer asserted that march leaders needed more moral authority to generate stronger support in Boaco.

Aleman's Legacy

19. (C) Terming Arnoldo Aleman the undisputed authority figure in Boaco, PLC President Dr. Luna explained the reasons why the former Nicaraguan President still commands rural voters' devotion: visible benefits in the form of roads, schools and clinics. Aleman's campaign posture consisted of genuine and

extraordinarily deft socializing with constituents, a seemingly photographic memory for inter-generational minutiae such as the birthday of a child or the interment of a grandparent, plus indefatigable gladhanding, explained Luna. By comparison, he said too many politicians are virtually invisible, self-absorbed and colorless. For example, according to Vicar Moreira, Aleman successor Bolanos is a good, but unloved, man whose long-term projects have merit, yet are too complicated for the average Boacan to comprehend.

Perceptions of the U.S. Embassy and the U.S.

¶10. (C) Many people in Boaco have a friend or relative in the U.S. providing remittances that boost the local economy. Although the American Dream is alive and well here, visas are hard to come by; the consular information cards we brought were eagerly snapped up. Contrasted with the Dream is the perception that USG officials sometimes overstep the line of propriety with excessive criticism of Nicaragua, according to Herty 2006 group leader Gutierrez. (A constitutional law buff, Gutierrez expressed admiration for James Madison and welcomed our offer to send Public Diplomacy publications with the Founding Fathers and democracy U.S. style.) Incer (AA) professed that while the U.S. has acceptable ideas, the rhetoric occasionally gets out of hand. He reported that an Alvarado/Montealegre alliance would position the PLC to form a more robust electoral presence than the current loose organization. Ortega (AGB) and Dr. Luna (PLC) quoted the oft-mentioned notion that Montealegre is directly or indirectly favored by the U.S. Embassy.

Conclusion

¶11. (C) Respondents concurred on some basic premises concerning Nicaragua's current political landscape: a) the present leadership of both the Liberal Constitutional Party and the Sandinista Party required new blood and a measure of independence from the negative caudillismo of the past; b) a fragile democracy needs effective election monitoring and an educated electorate to choose viable alternatives to internecine violence.

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